

STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



**J. BRENDAN SHARKEY**  
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

March 19, 2015

Good Afternoon Representative Fleischmann, Senator Slossberg, and distinguished members of the Education Committee. I am here to testify in support of HB 7016 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MORE COMMISSION SPECIAL EDUCATION SELECT WORKING GROUP.

When I became Speaker, I sought to continue the good work of the MORE Commission with a newly created working group focused on efficiencies at the local school level. As they began their initial work, it quickly became clear that some of the major cost drivers of local school budgets are the delivery of special education services and compliance with federal and state mandates. The costs were so significant and the issues so complex that the subject of special education merited the creation of its own independent working group: the Special Education Subcommittee, chaired by Representatives Brian Becker, Michelle Cook, and Terri Wood.

The Working Group traveled around the state seeking input from school administrators, teachers, parents, advocates, and local officials, among others. HB 7016 represents an exhaustive effort from the group's first year of work. Yet, the proposals in this bill are survey level recommendations. They are commonsense reforms we should consider this year while the Working Group continues to identify new ways of improving special education.

While all of the ideas proposed in HB 7016 are laudable - from improving the format of IEPs and how students and parents access them to increasing the coordination and awareness of special education services and trainings offered at the state level - I would like to lend my particular support to the idea of regionally delivered special education services.

The best arguments for reimagining the delivery of these services are special education students themselves. There are currently too many gaps and an inconsistency of existing services across school districts. From the towns' perspective, not only are these costs unsustainable, they are unpredictable as students move between districts and new needs and accommodations are identified. I applaud the efforts made in HB7016 to improve the delivery of transportation, therapeutic care, and training for special education staff and school administrators.

I appreciate that the regional delivery of special education programs and services is an idea in its infancy. However, it is an initiative that I truly believe is worth moving forwarding in consultation with our RESCs. That is why it is imperative that we give them the tools that they need to see these important proposals contained in this bill are brought to fruition. With this in mind, I believe this bill will be strengthened by adding language that enables RESCs to take an inventory of existing services, establish a baseline of costs, and identify gaps and deficiencies in the way that we currently serve our special education students.

It is imperative that we improve special education delivery in our state to ensure that each special education student receives the same level of quality services. At the same time we need to offer our local school districts more predictability and relief when it comes to funding these services. HB 7016 moves us in that direction and I urge its support.



J. Brendan Sharkey  
Speaker of the House of Representatives